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Dr. Joshua Lederberg
Stanford University
Stanford, California 94305

Dear Dr. Lederberg,

The June 15 issue of Chemical and Engineering News, page 60, carries a curious quote from you which I am at a loss to interpret. Can you help me?

It's about penicillin and guinea pigs and whether or not the FDA would have to take food off the market which contains penicillin. You are quoted as saying that the Delaney Amendment wouldn't apply, since this deals only with food additives. And you go on to propose a "time-saving" solution to the problem of testing food additives: "Feed the compound to 39 mice for 3 months. Look out the window while the pathological slides are under the microscope. This will prove beyond doubt that the compound is safe for 200 million people for a lifetime's worth of consumption."

I have been writing about food additives for 20 years and I presume that your time-saving solution is ironical. But these days, with everybody and his uncle making pontifical pronouncements about food additives, it's hard to tell. For instance, in the current issue of Nutrition Today, Julius M. Coon, Chairman of the panel on Food Safety at the White House Conference on Nutrition, states positively that no harm has ever been done to anyone from food additives and that present methods of testing are all we need to guarantee the absolute safety of our food. In a recent issue of FDA Papers one of the officials most closely involved in the problem states that the American food supply contains, at present, as a conservative estimate, about 10,000 chemicals, that we know almost nothing about the potential for harm in any one of these, let alone any combination of two or three or, God forbid, 10,000.

Penicillin is, of course, an additive in many foods. Why would the Delaney Amendment not apply? I will be very grateful for any enlightenment you can give me.

Sincerely yours,

Ruth C. Adams
(Miss) Ruth C. Adams

RCA:mfs